

The Clinton/Gore Administration's Proposal to Help Sick Workers

Last summer, President Clinton instructed the National Economic Council (NEC) to coordinate a comprehensive review of the need for additional compensation programs to assist current and former workers throughout the Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear weapons complex.

The Clinton/Gore Administration's proposal is a fair and reasonable package to right the wrongs of the past. Energy Department and contractor employees who developed illnesses from their work in the department's nuclear weapons complex would receive the compensation and help they deserve. It is aimed to help all workers with occupational illnesses and their families, either through compensation from the federal government or assistance obtaining state workers' compensation.

FOR WORKERS WITH BERYLLIUM-RELATED ILLNESSES

Any past or present worker -- including federal and contractor employees, as well as individuals who worked for companies that manufactured beryllium for the U.S. government -- with chronic beryllium disease or beryllium sensitivity will receive compensation comparable to benefits provided to federal workers by the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA), including medical costs, lost wages and job retraining. Medical benefits would be full, first dollar coverage, meaning workers do not pay a co-pay or deductible and that all medical expenses are paid in full by the compensation program, including prescriptions, treatments and travel costs. Workers diagnosed with a beryllium-related pulmonary condition before the date this proposal is passed into law may choose a \$100,000 lump sum benefit or the compensation package.

FOR WORKERS WITH RADIOGENIC CANCERS

An approach modeled after the system the Department of Veterans' Affairs uses to compensate veterans exposed to radiation will determine eligibility for contractor workers with radiogenic cancers. If information about the amount of radiation workers were exposed to is not available, the Department of Energy will assume they were exposed to the highest amount of radiation associated with the tasks they performed. Where a work-related cancer is found, the benefits will be the same as those for beryllium affected workers, including full, first dollar medical coverage; lost wages and job retraining. Workers diagnosed with a radiogenic cancer before the date this proposal is passed into law may choose a \$100,000 lump sum benefit or the compensation package.

FOR GASEOUS DIFFUSION PLANT WORKERS

Federal and contractor workers at the Department of Energy's three former gaseous diffusion plants in Paducah, Ky., Piketon, Ohio, and Oak Ridge, Tenn. will be eligible for a lump sum benefit of \$100,000 if they have a primary lung or bone cancer or a cancer listed in the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act and were exposed to radioactive contaminants associated with processing reactor tailings for at least one year. Gaseous diffusion plant workers may apply for the same benefits available to workers with radiogenic cancers. If they are eligible to receive the compensation package, they may choose between it and the \$100,000 lump sum payment.

FOR EAST TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGY PARK WORKERS

A group of workers at the department's East Tennessee Technology Park in Oak Ridge who have illnesses which an independent panel of physicians finds were caused by workplace exposures could, upon Secretarial agreement with the finding, receive a \$100,000 lump sum benefit.

FOR WORKERS WITH OTHER OCCUPATIONAL ILLNESSES

A workers' advocacy office will be established within the Energy Department to help past and present employees of department contractors obtain benefits from state workers' compensation programs. Occupational physicians will review the cases of workers who have occupational illnesses not related to beryllium or radiation exposure. The office will help workers or their survivors submit a state compensation claim when work-related illnesses are found.